

Rankin County Juvenile Detention Center recognized as PBIS model

May 6, 2014

The Rankin County Juvenile Detention Center has been designated as a model program for its implementation of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Support (PBIS) program. A reception is scheduled for 2 to 3 p.m. Wednesday, May 7, at the Juvenile Detention Center, 100 Court Cove in Pelahatchie.

PBIS State Coordinator Selina Merrell will speak and present a banner at the reception.

PBIS, a national program, is a departure from traditional methods of discipline in juvenile detention facilities.

“It’s a whole new mind set of what most people think of with regard to juvenile delinquents,” said Detention Center Director Michelle Rhodes. “For so many years people thought kids were here to be punished. Juvenile detention is for rehabilitation.”

The Rankin County Juvenile Detention Center is the first detention facility in the state to implement the Positive Behavior Interventions and Support approach.

While the program is in operation in Rankin County, it touches juveniles from a fourth of the state. The Rankin County Juvenile Detention Center houses juveniles from 23 counties. The average daily population is 26, Rhodes said.

Students in detention have three behavior expectations: be respectful, be responsible and be safe.

It’s not easy. About 85 percent of the students have mental health issues. A full-time mental health worker is on staff at the detention center.

“We work with them. We work out behavior contracts. We warn them. And we teach them,” Rhodes said. “We want their behavior to be socially acceptable once they get out of here.”

“We reward positive behavior. We don’t focus on what they are doing wrong. We redirect them in a positive way,” Rhodes said. Good behavior earns privileges and rewards: use of I-pads, phone calls home, recreation time and snacks. Misbehavior results in reminders, or redirections, to the rules. After three redirections, a youth will lose privileges. “They have to just go sit in their pod during incentive time,” Rhodes said.

Incidents of disruptive behavior have declined since the program began a year ago.

Students continue their classroom work while in detention. Rankin Juvenile Detention Center Staff get the school record and individualized education plan for each student, and work to continue with that plan.

Each day, Rhodes, a mental health worker, a special education teacher, the education coordinator and another teacher review the progress of each student in detention and discuss what is working, and what isn’t.

Fourteen Mississippi counties have PBIS model programs in some of their schools. Counties include Rankin, Hinds, Alcorn, Chickasaw, Forrest, Harrison, Leake, Lamar, Lauderdale, Leflore, Newton, Oktibbeha, Pontotoc and Warren. A complete list of PBIS model site schools is at this link: <http://www.usm.edu/reachms/model-sites-locations>.

PBIS implementation is supported by grant funding from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs. Realizing Excellence for ALL Children in Mississippi (REACH MS), operating within the University of Southern Mississippi’s Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Special Education, works with districts which implement PBIS.

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